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TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

[24 May 2000]

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I. LAND AND PEOPLE

1. The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is the most southerly of the Caribbean islands, located seven miles north-east of Venezuela. The country is composed of two separate islands, Trinidad, which has an area of 4,820 square kilometres, and Tobago, which has an area of 303 square kilometres. Tobago is 32.2 km to the north-east of Trinidad. The capital city, Port of Spain, is located in the north-west of the island of Trinidad.

2. The population of Trinidad and Tobago is estimated at 1,290,413 persons, of whom 644,174 are male and 646,239 are female (mid-year estimates 1999). This figure represents a 0.7 per cent population growth from 1998 when the population was estimated to be 1,281,825 persons. The birth rate is estimated to be 13.42 and the death rate 7.3 persons per thousand, respectively. There is an average life expectancy of 73 years. Approximately 45.7 per cent of the population is below the age of 24 years; 45.2 per cent is between the ages of 25 and 59 and 9.1 per cent is 65 years or over (mid-year estimates 1999). In 1998, 27.9 per cent of the population was estimated to be below 15 years of age and 6.3 per cent of the population was estimated to be 65 years or over.

3. Fertility and mortality rates, 1995-1997:

FERTILITY RATES	1995	1996	1997
Crude birth rate (number of births per 1,000 population)	15.3	14.2	14.5
Total fertility rate (number of births per 1,000 women of child-bearing age)	1.8	1.7	1.7
General fertility rate (number of births per 1,000 women)	56.3	52.0	52.2
Gross reproduction rate (number of females born to an average woman throughout her reproductive years)	0.9	0.8	0.8
Child woman ratio (number of children aged 1-4 years per 1,000 women of child-bearing age)	298	277	262

MORTALITY RATES	1995	1996	1997
Crude death rate (number of deaths per 1,000 population)	7.2	7.4	7.2
Infant mortality rate (number of infant deaths per 1,000 live births)	17.1*	16.2	17.1
Post neo-natal mortality rate (number of infant deaths aged 1 month to 12 months per 1,000 live births)	3.3	4.0	4.0
Neo-natal mortality rate (number of infant deaths aged under 1 month per 1,000 live births)	13.9	12.2	13.1
Prenatal mortality rate (number of still births per 1,000 births)	24.5	23.5	22.4
Maternal mortality rate (average number of mothers who die while giving birth within any given week, per hundred thousand)	67.5	38.9	70.4

* Increase due to under-reporting in previous year.

4. Health care is available to the public free of cost in the nation's 7 hospitals, 100 health centres and 6 other health care facilities. These institutions are run by the Ministry of Health in conjunction with five Regional Health Authorities. Specialist medical services are also available at several private medical institutions throughout the country. There is a public psychiatric hospital based in St. Ann's. Ante-natal care is provided in public health institutions to ensure that pregnancies will result in live, well babies. Iron supplementation and multivitamins are provided to pregnant women and children free of charge.

5. Statistics for 1990-1996 indicate that 97 per cent of the population had access to safe water, and 1990 statistics reveal that 99 per cent of the population had access to adequate excreta disposal facilities.

6. According to 1990 statistics, the number of male headed households was 197,745 and the number of female headed households was 77,101. The population in male headed households was estimated to be 828,699 and the population in female headed households was estimated at 296,429 persons. The average number of persons in a male headed household was estimated at 4.19, with an average of 3.84 persons in female headed households.

OTHER RATES	1995	1996	1997
Sex ratio (number of males per hundred females)	101	101	100
Dependency ratio (number of persons under 15 years of age and those aged 65 and over per 1,000 population)	541.8	519.9	502.4
Crude marriage rate (number of marriages per 1,000 population, mid-year)	5.3	5.6	5.8
Crude divorce rate (number of divorces per 1,000 population, mid-year)	0.8	1.2	1.0

7. Trinidad and Tobago is noted for its ethnic diversity. Approximately 40.3 per cent of the population is of East Indian descent, 39.6 per cent is of African descent, 0.6 per cent is white, 0.4 per cent Chinese, 18.4 per cent mixed, 0.2 per cent other and 0.4 per cent not stated (1990 Population Census).

8. Religious tolerance allows for the active observance of many faiths. The majority of the population practise either Christianity, Hinduism, Islam or the Orisa religion. A public holiday is given in respect of each major religion in the country.

9. The official language of Trinidad and Tobago is English. The literacy rate by percentage of the population (1994 Statistics) is as follows:

LITERACY STATUS	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
Functionally literate	79.6	77.8	77.4
Functionally illiterate	15.6	13.8	14.6
Illiterate	7.5	8.4	8.0

10. The education system in Trinidad and Tobago is organized into public and private schools. Primary schools are for children between the ages of 5 and 12 and secondary schools for students between the ages of 12 and 20 years. Public government schools and government assisted denominational schools provide free education at the primary and the secondary school levels up to Form 5, equivalent to Grade 12. Successful students receive an additional two years' free schooling to write the Advanced Level examinations set by the Universities of Cambridge and London, England. There are also a number of private schools at both the primary and secondary levels. At present there are approximately 155 secondary schools and 477 primary schools throughout the country. In the 1998/1999 academic year, a total of 169,580 students were enrolled in primary schools. There are several institutions providing tertiary education throughout the country, including the University of the West Indies located at the

St. Augustine Campus in Trinidad. There is also a Law School and a Medical School based in Trinidad. Education is available for students at government assisted tertiary institutions at heavily subsidized rates.

11. Following recent significant financial and economic reforms, Trinidad and Tobago's economy has been on a positive growth path over the past five years. The economy grew by 3.6 per cent in 1998 and by 0.9 per cent in the first three months of 1999.

12. The principal sectors of the economy are: (i) oil, gas and petrochemicals, (ii) distribution, (iii) finance, insurance and real estate, (iv) construction, (v) transportation, storage and communications, (vi) government, (vii) manufacturing, (viii) other services, which include hotels, guest houses, education, community services and personal services, (ix) electricity and water, and (x) agriculture.

13. The economy is heavily dependent on the energy and energy-related sectors for most of its export earnings. These sectors comprise the petroleum and petrochemical industries, as well as other heavy industries utilizing natural gas as feedstock, producing methanol, fertilizers, natural gas liquids and iron and steel products. At present there are eight world-scale ammonia plants, four methanol plants, one urea plant, an iron and steel mill, a natural gas processing facility and a recently commissioned liquefied natural gas plant.

14. Gross domestic product:

YEAR	GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT (STT MILLIONS)
1999	41 044.90
1998	38 197.10
1997	36 969.70
1996	34 648.10
1995	31 665.00
1994	29 311.70
1993	24 490.50

15. In terms of each sector's contribution to the gross domestic product in 1998, the non-energy sectors comprise agriculture (2 per cent), manufacturing (8.3 per cent), construction (10.3 per cent), distribution (17.1 per cent), electricity and water (2.3 per cent), transport, storage and communication (9.5 per cent), finance, insurance and real estate (11.5 per cent), government (8.9 per cent), and other services (6.6 per cent).

16. The per capita income in 1998 was equivalent to US$ 4,261.

Monthly income levels: 1994–1998 (TT dollars)

Income	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Average income	1 712	1 831	1 895	1 966	2 180
Median income	1 300	1 400	1 500	1 500	1 800

17. During the period October 1998 to March 1999 the number of persons in the labour force averaged 562,600, of whom 307,300 were male and 173,300 were female.

Labour force data in relation to men and women are as follows:

Year	Total labour force	No. of males	No. of females
1998	558 700	344 600	214 100
1997	541 000	335 800	205 200

18. Unemployment rates (by numbers)

Year	No. of unemployed males	No. of unemployed females
1998	39 000	40 400
1997	41 300	39 000

Unemployment rates (by percentage)

Year	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Male	16.4	15.1	13.1	12.3	11.3
Female	21.8	20.6	21.0	19.4	18.9
Unemployment rate	18.5	17.1	16.2	15.0	14.2

19. Inflation rate (change in Consumer Price Index, percentage)

Year	1986	1989	1992	1995	1998	1999
Inflation Rate	7.7	11.4	6.6	5.3	5.6	2.3

The 1999 inflation rate represents the difference between September 1999 and September 1998.

20. Balance of payments – 31 December 1998 (in millions of US dollars)

Year ended 31 December	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Overall surplus (deficit)	181.0	32.5	213.5	175.3	80.6

21. In April 1993, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago dismantled the regime of exchange controls and introduced a liberal foreign exchange system in which the Trinidad and Tobago dollar was allowed to float. At the end of June 1999, the TT/US dollar exchange rate stood at 1 US$ = 6.2997 (this refers to the weighted average selling exchange rate).

22. The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago makes use of international assistance and cooperation to facilitate the full realization of human rights. For the 1999/2000 fiscal year, international funding for projects, programmes and other initiatives taken to further this realization will amount to 30.6 per cent of the total budget.

II. GENERAL POLITICAL STRUCTURE

23. Trinidad and Tobago is a sovereign democratic State founded on the rule of law, a principle expressly mentioned in the preamble to the Constitution. Trinidad and Tobago was formerly a British crown colony and it became self-governing in 1956. Trinidad and Tobago achieved full independence from Britain on 31 August 1962 and became a republic within the Commonwealth on 24 September 1976.

24. The people of Trinidad and Tobago, expressing their will through their elected representatives, are sovereign. The right to join political parties and to express political views is expressly recognized in section 4 (e) of the Constitution. For electoral purposes, Trinidad and Tobago is divided into 36 constituencies, two of which are in Tobago. There is an independent Elections and Boundaries Commission established by the Constitution. After a parliamentary election, the successful candidate in each constituency becomes a member of the House of Representatives, the lower House of Parliament. Parliament, unless dissolved sooner, shall continue for five years from the date of its first sitting after any dissolution, and then shall stand dissolved. A general election of members of the House of Representatives shall be held at such time within three months after every dissolution of Parliament as the President, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, shall appoint.

25. Trinidad and Tobago has held free and fair elections since 1956. In terms of its political history, the People's National Movement (PNM) came into power in September 1956 and remained undefeated until December 1986 when it lost to a coalition party called the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR). The NAR won a substantial victory in 1986, ending three decades of primacy by the PNM. Five years later, in November 1991, the PNM was returned to power. At the last general elections, in 1995, the United National Congress (UNC) and the PNM each won 17 of the 36 electoral seats. The remaining two seats in Tobago were won by the NAR. The UNC and the NAR opted to join to form the coalition Government which is still in power under the leadership of Prime Minister, Mr. Basdeo Panday. The next parliamentary elections are constitutionally due before February 2001.

26. In 1976, Trinidad and Tobago's independence Constitution was replaced with a Republican Constitution. This Constitution declares that it is the supreme law of Trinidad and Tobago and any other law that is inconsistent with this Constitution is void to the extent of the inconsistency. The Constitution is rooted in the separation of powers of the three branches of government, namely the executive, the legislature and the judiciary.

27. The executive authority of Trinidad and Tobago is vested in the President and, subject to the Constitution, may be exercised either directly or through officers subordinate to him. All the members of the bicameral Parliament elect the President. The Prime Minister, who is leader of the majority party in Parliament, is the Head of Government. Cabinet consists of the Prime Minister, the Attorney General and other Ministers of Government appointed by the Prime Minister from among the members of Parliament. The Constitution vests Cabinet with the general direction and control of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and makes Cabinet collectively responsible to Parliament. In the exercise of his functions under the Constitution, the President is required to act in accordance with the advice of Cabinet except where otherwise stated by the Constitution. The Cabinet can be removed from office by members of the legislature, on a vote of no confidence.

28. The legislative power of Trinidad and Tobago resides in Parliament, which according to the Constitution shall consist of the President, an upper house called the Senate and a lower House called the House of Representatives. The House of Representatives consists of 36 members elected by universal adult suffrage from the 36 constituencies into which Trinidad and Tobago is divided. Section 73 of the Constitution provides that the election of members of the House of Representatives shall be by secret ballot and in accordance with the first-past-the-post system (relative majority system). The Senate consists of 31 appointed members. Of the 31 senators, 16 are appointed on the advice of the Prime Minister, 6 are appointed on the advice of the Leader of the Opposition and 9 are appointed by the President at his discretion, from among outstanding persons from economic, social or community organizations and other major fields of endeavour. Parliament is empowered by section 53 of the Constitution to make laws for the peace, order and good government of Trinidad and Tobago. Although Parliament may alter the Constitution, some parts of it, such as the fundamental human rights provisions, are entrenched and can only be altered by Parliament with special majorities in each House of Parliament.

29. In 1888, the island of Tobago merged administratively with Trinidad to form the single colony of Trinidad and Tobago. Until 1980, the smaller island's affairs were administered entirely from Port of Spain, Trinidad's capital city. With the passage of an Act of Parliament in 1980, the Tobago House of Assembly was established for the purpose of making better provision for the administration of the island of Tobago. The 1980 Act was repealed and replaced with a new Tobago House of Assembly Act in 1996. Under the 1996 Act the Assembly is a body corporate consisting of 12 assemblymen elected by the people of Tobago, four appointed councillors and a presiding officer. The assemblymen elect from among their members the Chief Secretary and the Deputy Chief Secretary. The Assembly continues for four years from the date of its first sitting. The Act provides that the House of Assembly is responsible inter alia for the formulation and implementation of policy on matters including finance, that is to say, the collection of revenue and the meeting of expenditure incurred in the carrying out of the functions of the Assembly; State lands; land and marine parks; tourism; sports; culture and the arts;

community development; agriculture; fisheries; food production; forestry; town and country planning; the environment; customs and excise; health services and housing. The matters for which the assembly is not responsible are national security, immigration and the judiciary, among others. The Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago retains general direction and control of the Assembly in accordance with the Constitution.

30. The Constitution establishes a supreme court of judicature for Trinidad and Tobago consisting of a high court of justice and a court of appeal. The Chief Justice has overall responsibility for the administration of justice in Trinidad and Tobago and heads the independent Judiciary. The judiciary comprises the higher judiciary (the Supreme Court of Judicature) and the lower judiciary (the Magistracy). The Supreme Court is housed in four locations in the country. The Magistracy is divided into 13 districts. The Magistracy and the High Court exercise original jurisdiction in civil and criminal matters. The Magistracy in its petty civil division deals with civil matters involving sums of less than TT$ 15,000. It exercises summary jurisdiction in criminal matters and hears preliminary inquiries in indictable matters to determine whether a matter is to be held over for trial in the assizes. The High Court hears indictable criminal matters, family matters and civil matters involving sums over the petty civil limit. There is a separate industrial court and a tax appeal board, which are superior courts of record created by statute. Appeals from the Magistracy and the High Court lie to the Court of Appeal. The Chief Justice is the President of the Court of Appeal. Appeals from the Court of Appeal lie with the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in England, sometimes as of right and sometimes with leave of the Court of Appeal. The Privy Council is the highest court of appeal of Trinidad and Tobago.

III. GENERAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK WITHIN WHICH HUMAN RIGHTS ARE PROTECTED

31. The judicial body with responsibility for the enforcement of human rights is the judiciary. Although there are no special courts, cases involving infringement of human rights are usually listed on a priority basis in the courts.

32. The following rights are protected by the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago. Chapter 1 of the Constitution is entitled "The recognition and protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms". Section 4 of this chapter provides as follows:

> "It is hereby recognized and declared that in Trinidad and Tobago there have existed and shall continue to exist, without discrimination by reason of race, origin, colour, religion or sex the following fundamental rights and freedoms, namely:
>
> (a) the right of the individual to life, liberty, security of the person and enjoyment of property and the right not to be deprived thereof except by due process of law;
>
> (b) the right of the individual to equality before the law and the protection of the law;
>
> (c) the right of the individual to respect for his private and family life;

(d) the right of the individual to equality of treatment from any public authority in the exercise of his functions;

(e) the right to join political parties and to express political views;

(f) the right of a parent or guardian to provide a school of his own choice for the education of his child or ward;

(g) freedom of movement;

(h) freedom of conscience and religious belief and observance;

(i) freedom of thought and expression;

(j) freedom of association and assembly; and

(k) freedom of the press."

Section 5 of the Constitution sets out in more detail the rights enshrined in section 4 of the Constitution.

33. Section 2 of the Constitution declares that it is the supreme law and any other law that is inconsistent with the Constitution is void to the extent of the inconsistency. The Constitution, in section 13, permits Parliament to pass laws which are inconsistent with the fundamental human rights sections of the Constitution. But before such a law can be passed it must be supported by no less than two thirds of all the members of each House of Parliament. Further, even if such a law is passed with the required parliamentary majorities, that legislation is still open to challenge in the High Court, on the ground that it is not reasonably justifiable in a society that has a proper respect for the rights and freedoms of the individual, or that it is not reasonably justifiable for the purpose of dealing with the situation that exists during a period of public emergency.

34. If an individual's constitutional rights are violated or are likely to be violated by any branch of government, or any servant or agent of the State, the Constitution provides in section 14, that the person may apply by way of originating motion to the High Court for redress. The High Court has original jurisdiction in constitutional matters but the Constitution provides a right of appeal to the Court of Appeal and a further right of appeal to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in any proceedings which involve a question as to the interpretation of the Constitution. If the Court finds any violation of a constitutional right, it would usually make a declaration to this effect and award monetary compensation to the aggrieved person. The rights set out in the Constitution are not limited to citizens but are enjoyed by all individuals within the jurisdiction including visitors, persons serving sentences of imprisonment and persons under sentence of death.

35. The Constitution, in section 8, provides that the President may from time to time make a proclamation declaring that a state of public emergency exists. A proclamation shall not be effective unless it contains a declaration that the President is satisfied that a public emergency

has arisen as a result of either the imminence of a state of war between Trinidad and Tobago and a foreign State; any earthquake, hurricane, flood, fire, outbreak of pestilence or of infectious disease, or other calamity, or that action has been taken or is immediately threatened, by any person, of such a nature and on so extensive a scale, as to be likely to endanger public safety or to deprive the community or any substantial portion of the community, of supplies or services essential to life.

36. The Constitution permits some derogation from constitutional rights in time of emergency. Where any period of emergency exists, the President may make regulations for dealing with that situation, including provisions for detaining persons. An act that is passed during a period of public emergency is expressly declared to have effect only during that period, even though inconsistent with sections 4 and 5 of the Constitution (the fundamental rights sections), except insofar as its provisions may be shown not to be reasonably justifiable for the purpose of dealing with the situation that exists during that period. Where any person is unlawfully detained by virtue of an act or regulations passed during a period of emergency, he may request at any time during his detention that his case be reviewed by an independent and impartial tribunal established by law and presided over by a person appointed by the Chief Justice.

37. Another effective domestic remedy available to an individual who claims that his rights have been violated is the judicial review procedure provided under the Rules of the Supreme Court. This procedure is only available if there are no alternative remedies and if a person's rights have been violated by a body or authority exercising functions in the nature of public law. Before judicial review proceedings can be brought, ex parte leave must be obtained from the High Court. If the requirements for leave have been satisfied, the High Court will then conduct a review of the decision or conduct of the authority to determine whether or not the authority has acted within its powers and in accordance with the principles of natural justice, including the right to a fair hearing. An authority's decision can be quashed on the grounds inter alia of illegality, irrationality and procedural impropriety. The Court is empowered to award damages on an application for judicial review, if such damages would have been recoverable in an ordinary action begun by writ or constitutional motion. As with constitutional cases, these cases can be appealed to the Court of Appeal and the Privy Council.

38. One administrative authority with jurisdiction for investigating alleged infringements of human rights is the Ombudsman. His role is to investigate complaints made by individuals concerning the administrative acts or decisions of Government agencies. The Ombudsman holds office for a period of five years and is appointed by the President acting in consultation with the Prime Minister and the Leader of Opposition. The Ombudsman Act No. 23 of 1977 provides that complaints to the Ombudsman and requests for investigation shall be made in writing, but in practice complaints made by telephone or fax are acted upon. Section 3 (4) of the Act states that where the Ombudsman is of the opinion that there is evidence of any breach of duty, misconduct or criminal offence on the part of any officer or employee of any department or authority, he may refer the matter to the authority competent to take such disciplinary or other proceedings against him. The Ombudsman has published annual reports since 1977. On average1,000 new complaints are made to the Ombudsman each year. The Ombudsman in his 1997 report stated that complaints are received from citizens throughout the two islands and from every social

group, race and class. In 1997, a total of 1,276 complaints were made to the Ombudsman and by year end the Ombudsman had completed investigations on some 48 per cent of these complaints.

39. Another administrative body with jurisdiction affecting human rights is the Police Complaints Authority. This is a statutory body set up in 1995, which consists of five members appointed by the President. At present the Chairman of the Authority is a retired Court of Appeal judge. The functions of the Authority under the Act are to receive complaints on the conduct of any police officer and to monitor the investigation of complaints by the Complaints Division. The Complaints Division set up by the Commissioner of Police in accordance with the Act is staffed by police officers. The Complaints Authority records all complaints and submits them to the Complaints Division for investigation and resolution. The Division investigates all complaints in a thorough and impartial manner, except that where the Head of the Division is of the view that the complaint is frivolous, no action shall be undertaken. Complaints may be resolved in a number of ways, including by counselling, instituting disciplinary proceedings or by criminal court action.

40. Other than the Constitution, there are several pieces of domestic legislation geared to the protection of various human rights. The following are recent examples:

The Domestic Violence Act, 1999 was enacted to replace the Domestic Violence Act, 1991 with the aim of ensuring a prompt and equitable legal remedy for victims of domestic violence. Section 23 of the new Act gives a police officer the power to enter private premises without a warrant where he has reasonable cause to believe that a person is engaging in conduct which amounts to physical violence and failure to act immediately may result in physical injury or death.

The Legal Aid and Advice (Amendment) Act, 1999 was enacted recently to amend the existing legal aid scheme. The Act for example allows more persons to qualify for the grant of legal aid and for the fees payable to lawyers in legal aid matters to be increased. Further, where a person desires legal aid as a matter of urgency in respect of proceedings relating to domestic violence, the Director of the Legal Aid Authority now has the power to issue an emergency certificate to enable that person to obtain prompt representation.

The Maternity Protection Act, 1998 was implemented to prevent discrimination against women by employers on the grounds of pregnancy.

Marriages are permitted in Trinidad and Tobago under various pieces of legislation which facilitate freedom of religion. These include the Marriage Act, the Muslim Marriage Act and the Hindu Marriage Act. In 1999 in recognition of the growing number of persons of the Orisa faith, the Orisa Marriage Act was enacted.

The Cohabitational Relationships Act No. 30 of 1998 was implemented in recognition of the high incidence of common law unions and the rights of common law spouses. Previously common law spouses had no rights, yet it was estimated that no fewer than 40,724 people lived in common law unions (1990 Census). Under this legislation, common law spouses who have been living in a cohabitational relationship for not less than five years or who have a child

arising out of that relationship, have the right to make an application to the High Court for maintenance or property adjustments.

41. There are other pieces of legislation which have been drafted but still have to be enacted into law. Some of the more significant reforms proposed include the following:

Equal opportunities legislation has been drafted with the object of ensuring that no individual is excluded from the nation's benefits and resources on the grounds of sex, gender, race, ethnicity or religion. However discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation is not prohibited under this proposed legislation.

The Children's Authority Bill, 1999 seeks to establish an authority which is to act as the guardian of the children of Trinidad and Tobago. The legislation will allow the authority to receive and temporarily assume parental rights and obligations with respect to any child brought to its attention as being in need of care and protection.

The Adoption of Children Bill, 1999 will repeal the existing law relating to adoption. The legislation proposes to regulate the procedure governing adoption and remove the nationality restriction imposed under existing laws.

The Children's Community Residences, Foster Homes and Nurseries Bill, 1999 seeks to make provision for the monitoring, licensing and regulating of children's homes, rehabilitation centres, foster homes and nurseries.

The Occupational Safety and Health (No. 2) Bill, 1999: the object of this proposed bill is to replace outdated legislation with legislation which is on a par with international standards.

42. In Trinidad and Tobago, international law provisions are not automatically incorporated into and do not have direct effect in municipal law unless expressly transformed into domestic law by Act of Parliament. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago is currently reviewing all treaties and conventions entered into, to ensure that international obligations are being given effect in domestic law and, where necessary, legislation is being drafted for implementation.

IV. INFORMATION AND PUBLICITY

43. The Human Rights Unit of the Ministry of the Attorney General was formed in 1998 and is responsible for the preparation of all the periodic reports that are part of the treaty obligations of Trinidad and Tobago, under the various international human rights agreements to which it is a State party. Some of the other functions of the Unit are as follows:

The preparation of responses on behalf of the State in respect of petitions and communications submitted to the international human rights bodies claiming violations of treaty obligations by Trinidad and Tobago.

The provision of advice on the ratification of those international human rights instruments not yet ratified by Trinidad and Tobago.

The review of reservations entered into by Trinidad and Tobago to international human rights treaties already ratified.

The review of the compatibility of domestic laws in Trinidad and Tobago with obligations under international human rights treaties.

The promotion of a greater awareness of human rights instruments and Trinidad and Tobago's legal obligations under them.

The provision of representation before the supervising committees, namely the Human Rights Committee, and the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

44. In addition to the Human Rights Unit, a special Cabinet-appointed committee comprising representatives of all the different Ministries of Government is currently being set up to provide a permanent interministerial body to supply up-to-date and accurate information on a continuous basis to the Human Rights Unit.

45. While in the past reports were not widely circulated, the Government is taking steps to correct this. The third periodic report of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, prepared in 1999, was presented to Parliament and a statement was made by the Attorney General on that occasion. Copies of the report were then circulated to Trinidad and Tobago missions abroad, foreign missions in Trinidad and Tobago, international human rights organizations and all non-governmental organizations in Trinidad and Tobago. Comments have been requested from the various organizations on the content of the report. Currently, steps are being taken to have the report published on the web page of the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs and to have copies of the report made available for purchase by members of the public at a nominal fee. The report also contains a copy of the Covenant. The Government intends to continue to present these reports to Parliament and to make copies of them available to members of the public.

46. The Information Division of the Office of the Prime Minister is mandated to manage the Government's communications policy and is responsible inter alia for communicating with the public and providing access to government information and providing an enhanced public education facility. The Division has a television unit which produces television programmes and documentaries on national, social and cultural issues, and provides coverage of government activities. The Division's Radio Unit informs the population about government activities, projects and policies and broadcasts features relating to national and international events. The research arm of the Research/Library Unit is responsible for the production of leaflets, brochures, booklets, posters, etc. of national interest to the public, including human rights issues. Over the period 1996-1999, the Information Division of the Office of the Prime Minister produced over 25 programmes intended to educate the public about their civil rights, including a series on the administration of justice. With respect to the television unit, 11 features have been produced since 1996 to disseminate information on new and existing legislation affecting the public. These included:

Equal Opportunities Bill

Constitutional Amendment Bill

Criminal Justice
Domestic Violence Bill

International Criminal Court

Regional Magistrate's Conference

Dangerous Drugs Bill

Human Rights Day Speech

47. In the recent past, a booklet entitled "A citizen's guide to the Constitution" produced by the Ministry of the Attorney General, has been circulated to 600 school libraries, 100 rural schools, 68 private schools, 78 embassies, 90 special libraries and 30 foreign missions. Also circulated was a booklet entitled "Foundations of government" which provides information on the republican Constitution and the structure of government. Information on the United Nations is also circulated, subject to availability of material. The Ministry of Information also mounts displays to mark international days observed by the United Nations, including Human Rights Day.

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